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SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR AF/E - MBEYZEROV
PARIS FOR RKANEDA
LONDON FOR PLORD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL AU MA KSUM

SUBJECT: AU SUMMIT PLANNING: DATES SET, STILL SHORT ON
DETAILS

REF: A. 08 ANTANANARIVO 585
¶B. 08 ANTANANARIVO 701
¶C. 08 ANTANANARIVO 745

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: With seven months left before the African Union's annual summit descends upon Madagascar, Prime Minister Charles Rabemananjara finally convened the Antananarivo diplomatic corps to announce the dates (June 21 to July 3, 2009, with the heads of state here July 1-2 -- a change from previous information), solicit assistance, and make clear his high expectations for the international community's participation. The hastily arranged presentation was short on details, however, and left the audience with more questions than answers. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) The Assembly session (with heads of state) will occur July 1-2, with the entire event spread from June 21 to July 3, 2009. Foreign Minister Ranjeva explained privately to the ambassador that the change from previously announced dates (July 31 - August 1) was due to their realization that several member states' national days would have precluded the attendance of several heads of state. The revised dates allow all AU heads of state to participate, he said. Post has requested hotel space in anticipation of USG participation, to be determined.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: Although the diplomatic corps was most interested in at last hearing concrete dates, the GOM hosts had clearly hoped this would be an occasion for the donor community to step forward with enthusiastic pledges of support. Aside from the ambassador to Morocco, however, the room fell into an awkward silence that was eased only when the Prime Minister forced the Ministers of Public Works, Finance, and Youth to discuss their ministries' preparations. They reported on widely-known construction projects, all either finished or slated to be finished by May 2009, or on ambitious but ambiguous plans to "mobilize the population" in support of the summit. Estimates of expected attendance topped out at 4,000, but no one addressed the obvious shortage of hotel rooms or other logistics or security concerns. Behind the scenes, we are encouraging the GOM to communicate more openly and frequently with their "partners", as well as to coordinate more effectively with all of those from whom they are expecting or requesting various forms of support. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT